THE

DRAMA;

A

POEM.

LONDON:

Printed for J. WILLIAMS, (No. 39) Fleet Street.

M. DCC. LXXV.

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DEDICATION.

To ARTHUR MURPHY, *Esq*;

SIR,

THOUGH I cannot boaſt the Honour of a perſonal acquaintance with you, yet it would be paſſing the ſevereſt Cenſure on myſelf, to declare I had not that intellectual one, which the world, in general, claim with Men of diſtinguiſhed Abilities. I will not treſpaſs on your Delicacy, by giving Vent to the Fullneſs of my Admiration, or by repeating what is already univerſally

univerſally known and acknowledged. I only ſolicit your Patronage for the feeble Offſpring of a friendleſs Muſe, conſcious I cannot lay it before a better Judge than you, Sir, whoſe Writings have been ſo long the Prop and Ornament of the DRAMA; and that if any thing can give it ſhelter, it muſt be the protecting Influence of your Name.

I have the Honour to remain,

SIR,

Your moſt humble and

obedient Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

THE

DRAMA.

SEVERE his taſk in theſe degen'rate days,
Who raſhly dares to graſp one ſprig of Bayes;
The frown of cenſure, and pale envy's blight,
Long damp his ardour, and retard his flight.
In form of critic, lo! where link'd they ſtand,
With pride and dulneſs fix'd on either hand,
Pointing with rugged thorns the painful ſteep,
They ne'er aſcend, tho' round it doom'd to creep.

Not ſo, when Greece and Rome aſpir'd to fame,
Then critic, and ſound judgment were the ſame;
The poet ſought the gen'rous critic's aid,
And the ſame laurel gave them both a ſhade;
With all the terrors beating at my heart,
A novice feels in firſt eſſays of art,
With greateſt homage for ſuperior pow'rs,
Trembling I ſeek the muſe's ſacred bow'rs;
Sentenc'd in fancy, ere my fate be known,
As Churchill's theme I've raſhly made my own.
Miſtaken zeal, with folly at her ſide,
Oft has the Drama and its ſons decri'd;
Gave the profeſſion faults which nature knew,
And judg'd the many from an erring few.
Strictures like theſe for laughter only call,
From their own weakneſs they muſt quickly fall.

Let

Let railing bigots, and let pedant fools,
Of morals prate, and preecepts taught in ſchools,
Such clouds diſſolve at merit's dazzling ray,
As miſts are melted by the eye of day:
Shall he, whoſe quick'ning, animated frame,
Electric like, collects the poet's flame?
Whoſe glowing breaſt feels ev'ry paſſion roll,
And yields a body to great Shakeſpear's ſoul;
Gives him each ornament of art and grace,
And holds his mirror up to nature's face,
Not gain the meed of well-earn'd honeſt fame?
GARRICK, ſtep forward, and aſſert your claim.
Here charm'd attention could for ever wait,
Fixt on thy beauties, unconfin'd as great,
And wrapt in viſions of thy magic ſkill,
Indulge the tranſports which my boſom fill.

But what, tho' language were to feeling true,
Expreſſing ſtrongly all in thought I view,
What could it add, O GARRICK, to thy name,
Already foremoſt on the liſts of fame?
Warm'd, I may tell, as diff'rent maſks he wears,
We ſhake with laughter, or diſſolve in tears,
Dwell on his ſpirit, judgment, taſte, and grace,
And the keen light'nings flaſhing from his face;
But once behold the wonders of his art,
You'll find thoſe drawn by nature on your heart;
To point his excellence, or ſpeak his praiſe,
But ſtamps freſh value on the poet's lays.

Next on the line, yet diſtant, BARRY ſtands,
And takes precedence of the tragic bands.
Nor does preſumption only prop his claim,
Once genius warm'd him with her fineſt flame.

In

In love's ſoft tranſports, or its waſting care,
I feel each rapture, ev'ry pang I ſhare;
If in the Moor, by wildeſt paſſions preſt,
Who does not find the ſtorm aſſail his breaſt?
Now worn with years, and almoſt quench'd his beam,
He faintly glimmers like the embers gleam;
Yet in the ſparks of his expiring light,
Proves that the blaze which fir'd him once was bright:
Thus the grand column, or majeſtic dome,
Rear'd in the ſplendor of old Greece or Rome,
Tho' broke with tempeſts, and by time decay'd,
Retain a greatneſs, e'en in ruins laid.

Tho' weak the million, and to judge unfit,
Still cuſtom dubs them arbiters of wit;
Their breath alone 'tis ſwells the trump of fame,
And ſounds the poet's or the ſage's name.

Severe decree, and moſt the actor's bane,
Whoſe art is tried by folly's giddy train.
This MACKLIN felt, tho' merit's ſterling ſeal,
Long paſs'd him current in theatric ſcale.
Grant him unequal to his daring aim,
Did former ſervice no indulgence claim?
Too high ambition might have ſoar'd for praiſe,
But yet 'twas mingled with a wiſh to pleaſe:
Thus far humanity and juſtice plead;
Now let us ſpeak as taſte and candour lead.
Dark was his col'ring, but conception ſtrong;
If hard his manner, ſtill it ne'er was wrong.
Warm'd with the poet, to the part he roſe,
His anger fir'd us, and his terror froze;
And more; where quaintneſs ſhut out meaning's day,
MACKLIN threw light with fine diſcernment's ray:

If theſe are truths, which envy's ſelf muſt breathe,
Applauſe ſhould crown him with her greeneſt wreath.
Where, on her native quarry next to light,
Shall the muſe bend her melancholy flight?
Now half her ſons are ſwept by death's fell pow'r,
And ſcarce a gleam of hope remains of more.
O, ſacred fire! which once with active heat,
In Powell's and in Mossop's boſoms beat,
Where art thou fled? or doſt thou only reſt
In Garrick's and in Barry's feeling breaſt?
No, replies genius; I have found a part,
A favourite manſion in a female heart,
Where ſteady judgment and fine taſte prepare
Their richeſt off'rings, to detain me there;
Behold, where beauty, in the ſhape of grace,
With ſweetneſs beams from Barry, form and face;

There

There I reſide, enamour'd of the ſeat,
Heedleſs of envy or ambition's cheat,
And ne'er will quit her, 'till my rival time,
Shall raviſh life, as well as youth and prime.

A handſome figure, with an eaſy mien,
Are all SMITH's requiſites to fill the ſcene;
Flat, without compaſs, drawling on the ear,
In one dull tone th'unvaried voice we hear;
No flame of paſſion ever yet he knew,
Or, changing character, appear'd once new;
Perſon alone firſt gave him to the ſtage,
And habit guards him in this eaſy age.

REDDISH wants pow'r, th'emotion ſtrong to raiſe,
But his attention gains, and merits praiſe;
Tho' voice and feeling ſmall aſſiſtance lend,
He oft has pleas'd, and ſeldom does offend;

Unleſs

Unleſs, when folly fain would have him great,
And rant and ſtare uſurp expreſſion's ſeat.

O, how it moves me to the taunting jibe,
To hear ſome groundling of th'itin'rant tribe;
York, Bath, or Norwich, rank with DRURY's ſcene,
Now Frodſham's gone, and Inchbald has been ſeen.
What, tho' their Lee boaſts ſome faint ſtrokes of art,
Does he e'er touch with ſympathy the heart?
Where is that grace, that ſtation which commands,
Applauſe's tribute with her hundred hands?
His perſon's vulgar, his deportment's bad,
And tame correctneſs all he ever had.

Hibernia, whence the ſtage recruits her force,
Has juſt ſent LEWIS to the Theſpian courſe;
Bleſs'd with thoſe happy requiſites to pleaſe,
A perſon, ſpirit, elegance, and eaſe.

How cold ſhone Belcour before LEWIS came;
'Twas he reſtor'd him to the poet's flame:
Paſſions like his, ſuch genuine active fire,
May claim, indeed, the god of day for ſire.
BENSLEY has little, ſave what art ſupplies,
For ſtep-dame nature almoſt all denies;
Gloom ſhades his aſpect, diſcord's in his tone,
His joy's as grating as his tragic moan.
Yet ſuch a charm can induſtry impart,
Aided by worth, and merit of the heart,
That he ſtands higher on dramatic line,
Than he, whoſe talents, more than virtues, ſhine.
Of all her ſuitors in the Theſpian art,
Thalia holds KING neareſt to her heart;
Fix'd in his eye, the ſmiling goddeſs ſits,
And thence deals laughter with its loudeſt fits.

Eaſe and indulgence oft at merit's throne,
Prefer'd their plea, and claim'd him as their own;
Their wiſh obtained, Thalia then appear'd,
Struck with a danger which ſhe long had fear'd;
Her ſiſter's ſables, and her tears ſhe wore,
To woo the truant to her arms once more:
Subdu'd, the lover's fondneſs ſtood confeſt,
And claſp'd his weeping miſtreſs to his breaſt;
Vow'd to be conſtant to the ſuppliant maid,
Till death diſſolv'd the union nature made.

That part, an actor in the bloom of life
Plays with ſucceſs, he takes to him for wife,
Simpers and ogles with a wither'd face,
And trips the beau with antiquated grace.
Tho' WOODWARD once might boaſt of ſprightly eaſe,
And ev'ry frolic wantonneſs to pleaſe,

Why

Why muſt he gambol after youth is fled,
And winter ſcatters hoar upon his head?
Still there's a caſt his talents to employ,
Razor or Bobadil can never cloy.

When partial nature gifts a fav'rite ſon,
With more than toiling art had ever won,
Should not the muſe, if ſloth the bounty mar,
Cenſure the culprit who neglects her care?
SHUTER, tho' bleſs'd with humour's richeſt vein,
And ſkill to reach the higheſt comic ſtrain,
Forgets his patroneſs, and ſlights her boon,
And, when he wants his part, becomes buffoon.

As folly's offspring ſport in faſhion's glare,
Flutt'ring in ſilks, with well-bred ſhrug and ſtare,
The inſect tribe DODD paints with niceſt art,
And gives a double edge to ſatire's dart.

Nature

Nature has dealt to CLINCH with lib'ral hand,
Talents, which cultur'd, might applauſe command;
But vain the grant, and ſlow muſt riſe his fame,
Unleſs the manager will fan the flame.

BRERETON has perſon, is not void of grace,
But wants the energy of voice and face;
In gay deſcription, or in póliſh'd eaſe,
His taſte and judgment never fail to pleaſe.
And when by time he's ripen'd on the bow,
He'll merit that ſucceſs he wiſhes now.

Let thoſe whom pride attract, not ſenſe and choice,
Expire in raptures at an eunuch's voice,
And feigning tranſports which they never felt,
At unintelligible nonſenſe melt.
For me, a plain, rough, honeſt Briton bred,
Who oft have err'd, but by my heart was led,

Who, tho' a monarch ſhou'd his favours heap,
Dare ſpurn at folly, and at op'ra ſleep:
I call on VERNON, if a ſound muſt feaſt,
To ſtamp it with the currency of taſte.

Few can, like BANNISTER, with humour ſtrong,
Do equal juſtice both to wit and ſong;
And could the muſe award the mimic praiſe,
FOOT would not ſtand much higher in her lays.

Faint as a ſhadow CAUTHERLEY glides by,
And melts without impreſſion on the eye.
When DIBDIN's boaſt was a compoſer's name,
He ſtood the rival of the author's fame,
Till ſeiz'd with madneſs, not poetic fire,
He raſhly dar'd himſelf to touch the lyre,
When Phœbus, ſhock'd at diſcord not his own,
Gave him to cenſure with her hiſs and groan.

A greater bard, on MOODY's brow has plac'd
A wreath with which it ever muſt be grac'd;
Conſcious I cannot give increaſe of bays,
I'll add, at leaſt, my humble meed of praiſe.

QUICK wants not parts, but SHUTER is the ſun
Round which he moves, and borrows all his fun.

In the harſh parent, or the ruſtic boor,
DUNSTALL and PARSONS ſhew ſtrong comic pow'r.

PALMER gives ſpirit to the ſprightly ſcene,
By gay deportment and a pleaſing mien:
But when he woos the tuneful queen of tears,
His accents wound the muſe's finer ears;
Shock'd at the ſound, we ſcarcely can believe
That the ſame man cou'd ever pleaſure give.

Without an effort, WESTON gains applauſe,
Nature has made him what the poet draws:

Others,

Others, with trick, and ſtage manœuvre aim,
To ſtrike the groundlings, and their clap obtain;
Shew Johnſon's Drugger, ſkill'd in Broughton art,
And Scrub, inſtead of fool, a downright ſmart:
But he, ſuperior to ſuch paltry aid,
Ne'er makes a jeſt but what his author made;
True humour, free from taint of low grimace,
Or wild diſtortion, ſits upon his face:
Tho' laughter ſhake, unconſcious he receives
The echoing plaudit public favour gives.
LEWES, in Marlow, makes his audience feel,
That he has head and heart as well as heel.
The needy emigrant from Gallia's ſhore,
The butt of ridicule ſince time of yore,
Who ſtruts in frippery and tinſell'd ſtuff,
And jabbers nonſenſe, as he ſcoops up ſnuff;

BADD'LY,

BADD'LY, with humour's pencil, ſtrongly draws,
And meets, as he deſerves, with warm applauſe.
Cold, and unmeaning, AICKIN fills a part,
And never gains the head, or moves the heart.
With jointed ſound, proceed his jarring tones,
Like currents harſh, and broke with beds of ſtones.
His acting's vappid, it wants feeling's ſoul,
To warm and quicken, into life the whole.
HULL's always perfect, and diſplays an aim,
To catch the poet's ſpirit, and his flame;
At times, he ſoars beyond chill medium's line,
And ſhews ſome ſparks of excellence that ſhine.
What numbers cenſure, but how few judge right,
On ſubjects, which demand the ſoul's keen ſight;
Each puny witling, from ſtark folly vain,
Dares JOHNSON's talents, or a SWIFT's arraign,

Merit by malice, not with taſte they ſcan,
And damn the art, becauſe they hate the man.
'Tis certain MELMOTH has not gain'd that height,
On which perfection ſeated, drops her flight.
His perſon too wants weight, but then his heart,
Springs in his words, and animates each part.
Apollo pleads his cauſe; and dare the muſe,
To hear her prince, and patron's voice refuſe?

WROUGHTON has perſon, and conception juſt,
But wants ſtrong feeling to be rank'd as firſt.
A happy aſpect, and a wiſh to pleaſe,
Deſerve at leaſt, if not extort our praiſe.

When ſurly winter with his felon train,
Flies to ſome cavern on the howling main,
And blooming ſummer leads the ſprightly hours,
Then FOOTE collects his vagrant ſcatter'd pow'rs,

Poet and manager, at once he ſtands,
And ſtarts upon the town his motley bands.
'Tis raſh to cenſure, where the public praiſe
Gives to the actor, and the author bays.
But ſure applauſe, ſhould never be his meed,
Who ſports with faults which weyward fate decreed,
Who breaks that tye, which binds each noble breaſt,
And ſtabs his friend before he'll loſe his jeſt.
Succeſs is giddy, as the veering blaſt,
And when it is not juſt, can never laſt.
Tho' now the ſenſeleſs rabble may eſteem,
The home-felt col'ring of his time-wrought ſcene,
Ages to come, where poets ſhould appeal,
Will never laugh at what they cannot feel.
Perſon and elegance are YATES's claim,
They're her chief paſſports, to the court of fame.

Her action's moulded into grace, and eaſe,
And plaudits from the niceſt judgement raiſe.
Kindling ſhe glows with all the poet's fires,
And ſtrongly feeling ev'ry heart inſpires.
Still with a ſigh, too clearly we behold,
The greateſt ſpirit muſt with years wax cold.
YOUNG's ſpeaking's juſt, her action too is right,
Yet ſeem like nymphs in boddice lac'd too tight,
What need ſo oft, the cloſe join'd hands to raiſe;
Or bow like Bramin in his idol's praiſe.
And then that ſtalk, which Zanga well befits,
But ne'er with grace on female ſoftneſs ſits.
Yet ſpite of all her faults, her merits ſhine,
And prove her YATES's rival on the line.
How ſhall I treat thee, HARTLEY, to preſerve,
That homage, candour and the fair deſerve?

For

For ſure if Venus choſe a mortal mould,
The radiance of her charms divine t'enfold,
HARTLY had been, the ſacred, envi'd ſeat,
To which a goddeſs may indeed retreat.
Beauty, like charity, a charm ſpreads wide,
Veiling a multitude of faults beſide.
Spirit, and grace, BARSANTI I allow,
And hope to ſee her what a POPE is now.
MACKLIN has judgment ſolid, taſte refin'd,
With every bright embelliſhment of mind;
No charm, or ſpells, within her dimples lie,
Or fluttering cupids, ambuſh in her eye.
Sheer merit only, and the force of ſkill,
Firſt gained her trophies, and maintain them ſtill;
No touch of harmony can ſtrike the heart,
With half that magic CATLEY's ſtrains impart;

But folly, as if envious of her fame,
With geſture vulgar, and uncouth, proclaim,
That acting in a female ſhould have grace,
Or modeſty, at leaſt, to fill it's place.

Of ſterling humour, GREEN has ample ſtore,
Perhaps e'en CLIVE was never bleſſed with more.
Mark where in Heidleberg, th' extreams of life,
Like Groom, and Peer, are conſtantly at ſtrife;
Or elſe when Termagant, with luckleſs hit,
Stumbles on nonſenſe, in her ſearch for wit.
And if a STANHOPE's precept have no weight;
You'll own by laughter; that her merit's great;

No woman without beauty, or great ſkill;
Can, or cou'd ever, on the ſtage excell.
That prop alone, ſupports a MELMOTH's name,
While the ſad want prevents a MATTOCK's fame.

If muſic's voice, the throbbing breaſt can move,
Or melting ſoftneſs, wake the ſoul to love;
If mild expreſſion, beaming from a face,
Where ſweetneſs revels with reſiſtleſs grace,
Can cold attention into rapture warm,
Behold in BADD'LY ev'ry pow'r to charm.

What CLIVE was once, POPE is, as Churchill told,
'Ere rip'ning time her talents cou'd unfold:
Late may the ſtage lament her abſent aid,
And never, till with equal genius paid.

How few can ever reach that happy line,
Where ſenſe, and ſpirit, by their union ſhine;
And ſoftned into eaſe, with niceſt art,
Aſſail at once, the judgment and the heart.
That rareſt talent, ABINGTON alone,
Poſſeſſes in perfection, all her own.

What woman elſe, with ſuch a grace diſplays
The courtly manners, and true poliſh'd eaſe.
Her ſkill gives ſanction to vain faſhion's flare,
And makes the critic even folly bear.

Freſh crouds preſs forward on the muſe's ſight,
But paſs like ſhadows at th'approach of night.
So when the Trojan, future time t'explore,
Sought the duſk limits of the Stygian ſhore,
The Ghoſts in throngs beſet the Hero round,
With feeble clamours, and a ſhrieking ſound;
But when he ſtretch'd, the fading forms to chaſe,
Their bodies melt, he graſps the vacant ſpace.
Yet ſtill theſe nothings, inſolent and vain,
Expect proud reaſon's ſentence to obtain.
Then mark my tale, and weigh the moral well,
If right conceiv'd, 'twill folly's rudeneſs quell.

The vain Florella once, at pride's command,
Sat for her portrait to a famous hand:
The painter tried the utmoſt of his ſkill,
But found it baffled by the object ſtill.
No trace of character, or glow of heart,
Fluſh'd on her face, to ſtrike the glance of art.
In fruitleſs toil, he ſaw his work muſt end,
When mind, and ſoul no inſpiration lend.
Then bade the fool, ſome other artiſt try,
Sick of the taſk, and laid his pencil by.

F I N I S.

The vain Florelli once, at pride's command,
Sat for her portrait to a famous hand:
The painter tried the utmost of his skill,
But found it baffled by the obdurate will.
No trace of character, or glow of heart,
Flush'd on her face, to shame the glance of art.
In fruitless toil, he drew his weak mind out,
When mind, and soul no inspiration lend.
Then bade the fool, some other artist try,
Sick of the task, and laid his pencil by.

FINIS.